

LORDS AND RETAINERS

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regiments for his wars from the nobles, who themselves enlisted and maintained the soldiers under their private banners.¹ In intervals of peace, or in years when there was no invasion of France, these military brokers did not always discharge their forces, but engaged them on more questionable private quarrels at home. It would be wrong to suppose that all retainers were braves and swashbucklers. Many of them were professional soldiers who fought our battles in France. The heroes of Greycy and of Agincourt, the * stout yeomen whose limbs were made in England/ were most of them * retainers ' employed by great lords who were paid by the King to bring them into the field. Chaucer's 'very parfit,' gentle knight,' who adorns the first page of the ' Canterbury Tales,' has returned from letting out his services abroad, and is the sort of person to enter into a similar contract with some noble at home. Although many of his calling had a worse reputation, Chaucer's selection of him to represent the profession shows that there were many respectable members of society in the ranks of these soldiers of fortune. The evil of the system was the use to which they were too often put by their employers, when not engaged in fighting the battles of their country.

Although seignorial justice administered by barons in their private courts now played a very small part in the judicial system of the country, the judges, sheriffs and juries of the royal tribunals were often so effectively terrorised by the hired retainers of some local magnate that the result was very much the same as in the bad old feudal days of King Stephen.

* Maintenance' was the act of maintaining the cause of a dependent in the King's Court by a display of force calculated to influence the decision. Any fellow wearing the livery and receiving the pay of a nobleman such as the Earl of Warwick, could, with comparative safety, rob the barns and stables of a neighbouring manor-house or appropriate a farm belonging to a citizen of Stratford-on-Avon, for he would be supported at the assizes by two hundred stout fellows wearing the bear-and-ragged-staff in their caps. But he would look in vain for the maintenance of his lord if he ventured to carry

off corn from
the miller of Kenilworth ; for the miller
was a tenant of
the Duke of Lancaster, one of the few noblemen
who kept a